



A case study of EFL teachers' attitudes toward gender related differences of language learners

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ABSTRACT

Teacher cognition research is an important field of enquiry in applied linguistics. The importance of taking into account teachers' own attitudes and viewpoints has long been recognized as a valuable area of study because we can only discover some important issues if we study teachers' mentality toward those issues to find out how they see them and affect them and are affected by them. The aim of this explorative qualitative case study is to discover two EFL teachers' attitudes toward gender related differences of their language learners. It attempts to share their ideas. After classroom observations two EFL teachers were interviewed. We came to see that learners' gender can affect the teaching-learning process in some ways. During the interview the participants mentioned some differences between their male and female language learners such as motivation, organization, activity, and other differences in the classroom.

Keywords: teacher cognition, EFL teachers' attitudes, learners' gender differences

1. INTRODUCTION

As part of second language teacher education, "teacher cognition research deals with understanding what teachers think, know and believe" (Borg, 2009, p.1). It goes without saying that teachers' mental processes create and shape their actual practices. That is, teachers are active and thinking decision-makers whose way of acting in the classroom comes directly from, and is determined by unobservable mental states. Understanding these unobservable dimensions of teachers' mental lives has long been recognized in the literature on teacher education because teacher cognition plays a pivotal role in teachers' classroom practices. Teachers as decision-makers "make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs" (Borg, 2003, p.81). In order to understand teachers, researchers need to investigate psychological processes through which teachers take meaningful actions (Borg, 2009). Some factors have to be taken into account when studying teacher cognition because their significant role in the construct of cognition is unquestionable. Among these important factors, language learners' gender which may seriously affect a teacher's attitudes and consequently way of teaching needs to be taken into serious consideration. The aim of this paper is to see how English language teachers think about their language learners' gender differences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

History of teacher cognition research goes back to more than 30 years ago. In the 1960s, researchers focused on the search for "effective teaching behaviors – i.e. behaviors that would result in greater learning" (Borg, 2009, p.1), and they based their research on the belief that these effective teaching behaviors are universally applicable. In the 1970s, however, this view of teaching was questioned. Developments in cognitive psychology demonstrated the existence of complex relationships between what people think and how they act and behave (Borg, 2009). Then educational researchers became more aware that, in teaching too, teachers' instructional choices were extremely influenced by their beliefs. So, the notion of universally applicable teaching behaviors was criticized due to the uniqueness of teaching contexts as teachers and learners as human beings (Borg, 2009). The result was a rapid growth of studying different aspects of teachers' beliefs and knowledge during the 1980s and 1990s. In the mid-1990s the study of L2 teacher cognition was considered as an important area of research to focus on. Then, there was a rapid increase in the number of studies examining L2 teachers' mental processes and its relationship to what they do.